



For Immediate Release
October 2, 2007

Roundtable on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
Statement of Senator Max Baucus

Helen Keller said: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement — nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

At its best, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program was meant to restore optimism. It was meant to restore hope and confidence. It was meant lead people back to achievement.

Congress enacted TANF in 1996. The law represented a broad consensus effort to move people toward their goals. It was meant to move people from welfare to work.

And it succeeded. Between 1995 and 2004, TANF caseloads were cut in half. Employment of single mothers increased substantially. And child poverty rates fell.

Because of the law's success — and recognizing that we still had work to do for families — I supported efforts to reauthorize TANF when it expired in 2002. In 2005, I worked with then-Chairman Grassley and other Members of the Finance Committee to write a TANF bill. The Committee passed it with an overwhelming majority.

Unfortunately, the Majority Leader at the time never brought that bill to the floor. The majority then included a much different version of TANF reauthorization in the Deficit Reduction Act — the DRA, that year's budget reconciliation bill.

How do we best serve the beneficiaries and implementers of this program now?

We can start by renewing our commitment to a broad consensus on TANF. With that, we can remedy some of the flaws in the DRA. One such flaw is the law's insufficient accommodation of people with barriers to employment.

I am pleased that today's roundtable will explore the influence of substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health on a person's ability to move into the workforce. I commend today's speakers for their dedication to success. And I also applaud them for their willingness to share their experiences with others today.

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We live in competitive times. America needs all of its citizens to be as productive as possible. The nation cannot afford to limit opportunities for any of its people. This economic imperative has implications for TANF legislation, just as it does for trade and our economic legislation.

I will watch closely how the administration works with states to protect the ability of people living in or near poverty to enter the workforce.

We cannot pretend that lowered caseloads alone mean success. We also need to ask how states are going to get there. We need to ask what our hardest-to-serve families are going to do to survive.

A safety net needs to be resilient enough to catch people during hard times. And it needs to be flexible enough to give them a bounce back onto solid ground.

TANF remains an important issue. It is important for me and others on the Committee. And I look forward to working on it with Committee Members.

Together, we can work toward measured improvements to TANF. We can work to make improvements that will help us to continue to move people into sustainable employment. And we can work to help give people the hope, confidence, and optimism that will lead to achievement.

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